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Editorial

Policy

All these years the Newsletter has reproduced, almost verbatim, with only a few minor corrections for grammatical reasons or for clarity, the articles received from contributors. Obviously there has been a very wide range in the quality of writing, and I feel the time has now come when bad language has to be corrected and made more readable and elegant.

While it is not difficult to do this in many cases, sometimes the whole piece needs to be re-written. The trouble taken is worthwhile because quite often badly written pieces contain excellent material, and it would be unfortunate if good observations are not included merely because of the poor and incorrect language. What I will do in future is that in such cases where the entire piece has been re-written, I will mention at the bottom - re-written by the Editor. I think it is important to do so because the author himself would, I am sure, not like to give a false impression of his own writing ability. I recall a few cases where Salim Ali out of his generosity re-wrote a considerable number of passages from theses presented by his students. The matter was of course not altered at all but the language was completely changed. Consequently, when the students were left entirely on their own to do the writing, they did not come up to the expectations aroused by their former presentations.

I think there is also now a case for compressing articles which are received, and if this is done I will make it clear that the publication is a precis of the author's original article.

Central Theme - Enjoyment of Birds

And this brings me to the problem about a central theme for our Newsletter. Each publication must have its own inner

soul as it were. Generally speaking, the Newsletter is meant to collect and distribute information about Indian birds so that the network of birdwatchers in this country are stimulated to increase their knowledge and contribute to this fascinating subject. But specifically speaking, I think the Newsletter's central theme should be the enjoyment of birds. Admittedly there are not many people who can present scientific facts in the sort of setting which make their reading enjoyable, but there are a few who do so, and I do hope that we will receive more and more contributions which are really good fun to

read. In the old days when everyone was not so rushed, people could sit back after a morning's walk and expand on the delightful scenes which they experienced during their outings. Not many have the time to do so, but those of you who can take the trouble to do so must remember that enjoyment of a subject is a very important aspect which stimulates its notaries to learn more and more about it.



Birds of Goa University Campus

S.K. SHYAMA, Department of Zoology, Goa University, Goa 403 203 and
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The Goa University Campus is located at a latitude 15° 12'N and longitude 73° 49'E covering an area of about 170 hectares. It lies about 5 km south of Panaji, the capital city of Goa, on the east-west trending Taleigao Plateau of Tiswadi taluka of South Goa district in Goa State.

The altitude varies from 50 to 60 metres above sea level. The area falls under the West Coast with its southern side bordered by Zuari Creek, and the northern side with flat valleys. The average annual rainfall is around 2616 mm and much of the precipitation is due to the South-West Monsoon between June to October. The campus enjoys a warm and humid coastal climate. The humidity during monsoon period is high, varying from 90-95%, and for the rest of the year it ranges between 80-85%. The average minimum temperature is about 21 degrees Celsius in winter, while it reaches an average maximum of 36 degrees Celsius in summer.

The campus was a barren land with grasslands and open scrub with plenty of herbs and shrubs and just a few trees, except for a small proportion of which was a farmland, before the establishment of the Goa University in the year 1985. Since then the area has undergone a drastic change in its landscape because of the planned construction of roads and buildings for Goa University. The present sylvan landscape of the campus is due to the massive plantation programme undertaken/encouraged by the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. P.R. Dubhashi. The greenery of the campus consists of diverse groups of plants which include around 67 species of trees, 186 species of herbs, 66 species of shrubs, 6 species of creepers, 5 species of climbers and 4 species of twiners (Mehtab & Rodrigues, 1994, unpublished). The vegetation/sprouting greenery of the Campus attracts a diverse group of birds.

The following is the checklist of the birds of the campus as per a recent study which includes 43 species representing 21 families.

Checklist of the Birds of Goa University Campus

Family : Ardeidae

1. Pond heron / Paddy bird (C) *Ardeola grayii*

Family : Accipitridae

2. Brahminy kite (VC) *Haliaeetus indus*
3. Whitebellied sea eagle (C) *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Family : Phasianidae

4. Red spurfowl (R) *Gallus domesticus*
5. Common peafowl (R) *Pavo cristatus*

Family : Charadriidae

6. Red-wattled lapwing (VC) *Vanellus indicus*
7. Yellow-wattled lapwing (VC) *Vanellus malabaricus*

Family : Columbidae

8. Blue rock pigeon (VC) *Columba livia*
9. Spotted dove (VC) *Streptopelia chinensis*

Family : Cuculidae

10. Pied crested cuckoo (C) *Clamator jacobinus*
11. Indian plaintive cuckoo (C) *Cacomantis passerinus*
12. Koel (C) *Eudynamis scolopacea*
13. Crow-pheasant or coucal (R) *Centropus sinensis*

Family : Strigidae

14. Spotted owl (VC) *Athene brama*

Family : Apodidae

15. House swift (VC) *Apus affinis*

Family : Alcedinidae

16. Whitebreasted kingfisher (VC) *Halcyon smyrnensis*

Family : Meropidae

17. Bluetailed bee-eater (R) *Merops philippinus*
18. Small green bee-eater (C) *Merops orientalis*

Family : Capitonidae

19. Small green barbet (C) *Megalaima viridis*

Family : Alaudidae

20. Malabar crested lark (C) *Galerida malabarica*

Family : Hirundinidae

21. Striated or redumped swallow (C)

Hirundo daurica

**Family : Oriolidae**

22. Blackheaded oriole (C)

Oriolus xanthornus

Family : Dicruridae

23. Black drongo / king crow (VC) *Dicrurus adsimilis*

Family : Sturnidae

24. Jungle myna (VC)

Acridotheres fuscus

Family : Corvidae

25. Indian tree pie (R)

Dendrocyta vagabunda

26. House crow (VC)

Corvus splendens

27. Jungle crow (C)

Corvus macrorhynchos

Family : Pycnonotidae

28. Redwhiskered bulbul (C)

Pycnonotus jocosus

29. Whitecheeked bulbul (R)

Pycnonotus leucogenys

30. Redvented bulbul (C)

Pycnonotus cafer

31. Whitebrowed bulbul (C)

Pycnonotus luteolus

Family : Muscicapidae

32. Wren-babbler (R)

Spelaornis sp.

33. Yelloweyed babbler (R)

Chrysomma sinense

34. Jungle babbler (VC)

Turdoides striatus

35. Tickell's blue flycatcher (R)

Muscicapa tickelliae

36. Tailor bird (C)

Orthotomus sutorius

37. Magpie-robin (VC)

Copsychus saularis

38. Indian robin (VC)

Saxicoloides fulicata

Family : Motacillidae

39. Large pied wagtail (R)

Motacilla maderaspatensis

Family : Ploceidae

40. House sparrow (VC)

Passer domesticus

41. Baya (VC)

Ploceus philippinus

42. Whitebacked munia (VC)

Lonchura striata

43. Blackheaded munia (C)

Lonchura malacca

Note :

VC = Very Common

C = Common

R = Rare

Acknowledgement

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References

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The Kole Wetlands – An Avian Paradise in Kerala

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The Kole wetlands are one of the richest places both for paddy cultivation as well as for water birds in Kerala. The wetlands lie between 10° 20' and 10° 40' north latitude and 75° 58' and 76° 11' east longitude. These lands, spread across Thrissur and Malappuram districts are estimated to be 13,632 hectares.

These lands were formerly lagoons which gradually got silted up. The major portion of the kole lands lie below MSL by 1.0 m to 2.5 m and are covered with water for 4 to 5 months a year. The area is richly covered with various monsoon plants and weeds.

In ancient times rice was grown in the areas once in a year during summer. The land was very fertile due to the silt deposited by monsoon floods from the thickly vegetated spur hills of the Western Ghats. 'Kole' meaning abundance in Malayalam, was associated with the good harvest gifted by nature.

The practice of separating 'Kayal' (lagoons) water from paddy fields is done by construction of 'mattons' (bunds) with bamboo and mud annually. Afterwards the flood water pumped out from the fields is stored in a network of canals



Enamavu regulator with a temporary 'matton'.

interspersed throughout the area. The excess water is drained into the sea.

Every year many migratory birds visit this wetland. Several thousand ducks, teals and terns arrive at the swamp every year in winter. Among them are garganey teal, lesser whistling teal, northern pintail duck, cotton pigmy goose and whiskered tern.



A typical habitat of the shy and retiring birds.

On 10th January 1993, in the course of the waterfowl census, Prabhakar, P.V., Jayaprakash R. and I saw a single spotbilled pelican flying at the Adat side. This sighting was the first report after 77 years from Kerala. On 17.1.93 at 14.00 hours, as we were crossing a reedy marsh by boat in Ponnary Kole, we saw four female comb ducks flying out of a dense patch of grass and reeds at Maranchery area, and on 21.2.93 Nameer P.O., Sivaprasad P.S., Sethumadhavan C.P. and I saw three female comb ducks at the same place. Another day Susanthkumar C. saw two comb ducks (one male and one female) at Parampadam near Kunnamkulam.

The other interesting sightings in these Kole lands included masked booby, oriental stork, Eurasian spoonbill, glossy ibis, blackheaded ibis, Asian openbill stork, oriental darter, blackbellied tern, osprey, plain martin, blackcapped kingfisher. A tern roost has been located where nearly 25,000 terns were counted. This may be one of the largest tern roosts in this state.

In addition, these wetlands serve as excellent feeding and breeding ground for resident waterfowl, and a host of other species. The large grass clumps in the marsh is an ideal habitat for shy and retiring birds like purple swamphen, common moorhen, water cock, whitebreasted water hen, slatybreasted rail, railon's crane, ruddybreasted crane, yellow bittern, cinnamon bittern, black bittern. Also the close proximity to the Arabian sea invites oceanic birds such as gulls and terns to come here.

A mangrove forest island lies in Chettuva Azhi down stream of Enamavu regulator. These islands were the roosting site of many migratory birds. But during the past few years hunters killed a large number of migratory birds and the birds no longer come here.

The bird life of these wetlands suffer in many ways - illegal bird poaching and trapping, use of pesticides and fertilizers, removal of aquatic vegetation, reed cutting, encroachment of cash crops (coconut plantations etc.) and other local disturbances. This truly handsome area deserves full protection for its bird life, as well as for its general ecological qualities.

Acknowledgement

I am most grateful to Sri Sashikumar C., Sri Unnikrishnan S. and Sri Sethumadhavan C.P., for their encouragement and support. I also wish to record my thanks to many farmers and the public in the Kole lands for their loveliness and sharing of experience.

Checklist of birds in Kole Wetlands

(The following list, the new scientific and common names accepting from Nomenclature of Birds of the Indian Sub-continent by Aasheesh Pittie and Andrew Robertson, Ornithological Society of India, Bangalore)

Sl. No.	Species	Status
1	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> R
2	Masked booby	<i>Sula dactylatra</i> S
3	Little cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i> R
4	Indian cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i> O
5	Oriental darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i> LMO
6	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i> R
7	Western reet heron	<i>Egretta gularis</i> LM
8	Intermediate egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i> LM
9	Great egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i> LM
10	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i> LM
11	Indian pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i> R
12	Striated heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i> R
13	Blackcrowned night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i> R
14	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i> LM
15	Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i> LM
16	Yellow bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i> R?
17	Cinnamon bittern	<i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i> R
18	Black bittern	<i>Ixobrychus flavicollis</i> R
19	Glossy ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i> M
20	Blackheaded ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i> M
21	Eurasian spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i> MO
22	Spotbilled pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i> MO
23	Asian openbill stork	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i> M
24	Woolynecked stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i> LM
25	Oriental stork	<i>Ciconia boyciana</i> M
26	Lesser whistling teal	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i> LM?
27	Comb duck	<i>Sarkidiomis melanotos</i> M
28	Cotton pigmy goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i> LM
29	Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i> M
30	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i> M
31	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i> M
32	Blackwinged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i> O
33	Black kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i> R
34	Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i> R
35	Western marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i> M
36	Pallid harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i> M

37	Pied harrier	<i>Circus melanoleucos</i>	M	85	Yellowlegged green pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>	O
38	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	R	86	Roseringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	R
39	Sparrow-hawk	<i>Accipiter nisus nisosimilis</i> (Tickell)	M	87	Plumheaded parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	R?
40	Slatybreasted rail	<i>Gallirallus striatus</i>	U	88	Pied cuckoo	<i>Oxylophus jacobinus</i>	LM
41	Whitebreasted waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	R	89	Common hawk-cuckoo	<i>Cuculus varius</i>	LM
42	Baillon's crane	<i>Porzana pusilla</i>	M	90	Indian cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	LM
43	Ruddybreasted crane	<i>Porzana fusca</i>	R	91	Banded bay cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sonneratii</i>	LM
44	Water cock	<i>Gallinula cinerea</i>	R	92	Greybellied cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>	LM
45	Purple swampphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	R	93	Asian koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	R
46	Common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	R?	94	Greater coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	R
47	Common coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	M	95	Asian palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>	R
48	Greater painted snipe	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>	O	96	Alpine swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	LM
49	Pheasant tailed jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	R?LM	97	Little swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	R
50	Bronzewinged jacana	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>	R	98	Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	R
51	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	M	99	Jungle owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>	R
52	Pintail snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>	M	100	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	R
53	Blacktailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	M	101	Storkbilled kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>	U
54	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	M	102	Whitethroated kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	R
55	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	M	103	Blackcapped kingfisher	<i>Halcyon pileata</i>	LM
56	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	M	104	Pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	R
57	Marsh sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	M	105	Little green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	R
58	Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	M	106	Bluetailed bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>	M
59	Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	M	107	Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	R
60	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	M	108	White cheeked barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>	R
61	Common sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>	M	109	Coppersmith barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	R
62	Little stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	M	110	Blackrumped flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	R
63	Temminck's stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	M	111	Rufouswinged lark	<i>Mirafrassa assamica</i>	R
64	Curlew-sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	M	112	Ashycrowned sparrow-lark	<i>Eremopterix gmelina</i>	R
65	Blackwinged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	M	113	Malabar crested lark	<i>Galerida malabarica</i>	R
66	Pacific golden plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	M	114	Oriental skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>	R
67	Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	M	115	Plain martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	M
68	Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	LM	116	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	M
69	Kentish plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	M	117	Redrumped swallow	<i>Hirundo dussumieri</i>	R
70	Mongolian plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	M	118	Rufous treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	R
71	Yellowwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	R?	119	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	R
72	Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	R	120	Largebilled crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	R
73	Oriental pratincole	<i>Glareola maldivarum</i>	M	121	Ashy woodshrike	<i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>	R
74	Little pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>	LM	122	Eurasian golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	M
75	Great blackheaded gull	<i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	M	123	Blackhooded oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>	R
76	Brownheaded gull	<i>Larus brunnicephalus</i>	M	124	Large cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>	R
77	Common blackheaded gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	M	125	Blackheaded cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>	R?
78	Gullbilled tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>	M	126	Whitebrowed tantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	R
79	Little tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	M	127	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	R
80	Blackbellied tern	<i>Sterna acuticauda</i>	M	128	Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	M
81	Whiskered tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	M	129	Rosy starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>	M
82	Rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	R	130	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	R
83	Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	R	131	Jungle myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	R
84	Emerald dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	R	132	Chestnuttailed starling	<i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>	U
				133	Asian paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	M



134 Common iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	R	161 Paddyfield pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>	R
135 Brown shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	M	162 Richard's pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>	M
136 Common wood shrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	R	163 Purple rumped sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>	R
137 Indian pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>	M	165 Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	R
138 Bluewinged leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>	R	166 Longbilled sunbird	<i>Nectarinia lotenia</i>	R
139 Redwhiskered bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	R	167 Streaked weaver	<i>Ploceus manyar</i>	R
140 Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	R	168 Baya weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	R
141 White browed bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>	R	169 Red avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>	R
142 Zitting cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	R	170 Whiterumped munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>	R
143 Greybreasted prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsoni</i>	U	171 Scalybreasted munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	R
144 Ashy prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	R	172 Blackheaded munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>	R
145 Plain prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>	R			
146 Blyth's reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	M			
147 Indian great reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>	R			
148 Common tailor bird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	R			
149 Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>	R			
150 Yellowbilled babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	R			
151 Blue throat	<i>Luscinia svecicus</i>	M			
152 Oriental magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	R			
153 Indian robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulcata</i>	R			
154 Black redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	M			
155 Chestnut shouldered petronia	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>	LM			
156 White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	M			
157 White browed wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	R			
158 Yellowhooded wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	M			
159 Yellow wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	M			
160 Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	M			

(R : resident; M : migrant; LM : local migrant
O : occasional; S : straggler; U : uncertain)

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Birding in the Arabian Desert

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Under the aegis of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD), an ornithological survey was carried out in north-west of Saudi Arabia, between March 30 and April 14, 1994. I had the opportunity to accompany Mr. Michael Jennings who is working on the Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia for the last 10 years. While Jennings recorded his observations on the pattern of his earlier data sheets, I wrote up our daily observations.

Methods

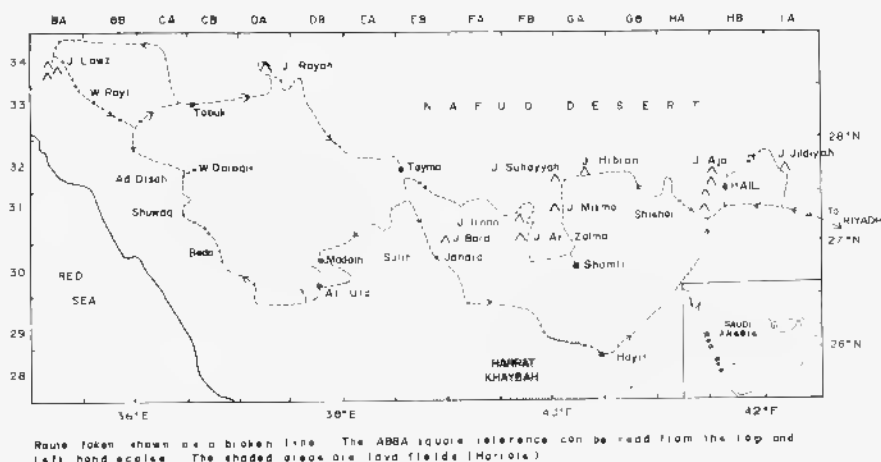
It was a random site selection and observation method within a known square. We used to drive along the desert and record each bird seen and heard. We stopped every now and then for a few minutes and looked around. Birds of each square (60 km = length and breadth) were recorded. Campsite areas were covered elaborately and at 13 campsites an early morning transect census of birds was carried out daily. Each square has a code and can be traced

on the map. We visited the mountains (Jabals) and looked for bird's roost/nest/perch sites. Surprisingly many birds keep close to these rocky hills. Though these hills are largely barren they attract many species of birds. We also visited nearby farms to record the bird species. Besides binoculars and telescopes the use of a GPS (Global Positioning System, which works through satellite) was very helpful and at some places we were able to find our way only with its help.

Study Area

The survey was mainly conducted in North-West part of the Kingdom. Although we were largely covering desert, one full day was devoted to trekking Wadi Lakus. Map 1 provides the location of our main survey areas.

We found frequent grazing of sheep, camel and donkey at many places. Though it is good for the economy, cultivation deep inside the desert may have its far reaching ecological effect. A separate study to assess the impact of fossil water use would be quite useful.



Map 1 : North - West Saudi Arabia, March - April 1994

However, apparently cultivation farms and fruit orchards have provided suitable habitats to many species of birds and during the survey Jennings found an extension of range for various species.

The desert area is not the same at all places. I noticed a micro-habitat change at almost each 25-30 km. Rocky mountains in the desert provide feeding, roosting and nesting sites to many species of birds. The diversity of birds was very low in areas where there were no mountains. These mountains may be serving as a vantage point for large birds like eagles and vultures as well as protecting several species from ghastly wind thrust. Some of the granite massifs consist of small perennial water holes which are useful for birds and other wild animals during summer.

Valley (Wadi) Qaraqir and Al Majeel (near Tabuk) were found to be more productive from birding points of view. Valley Qaraqir is a very interesting place and has been suggested to be the first World Heritage Site of the Kingdom. A thorough ornithological / ecological study of this area would be quite revealing. It is also a suitable place for mist netting and ringing birds. Mike Evans 1994 (Important bird areas of the Middle East), has given a good account of 39 prospective birding sites in the Kingdom.

Avifauna

There has been a rapid growth in the ornithological literature in Saudi Arabia during the last 8 years mainly after the creation of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD) under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Abuzinada, the Secretary General. Presently besides several long term field studies, captive breeding programmes on houbara and ostrich are also going on under the aegis of NCWCD. Several other projects on birds and other wildlife are in the pipeline. Jennings 1994 -

(Interim Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia) Rahmani et al 1994 (OSME Bulletin 32) have given a brief account of ornithological study in the Kingdom.

I did not anticipate that the Saudi Arabian desert avifauna would be so diversified. In 2 weeks time we recorded 110 species which is more than a 1/4 of the total found in the entire Kingdom. Our average daily sighting was 30 sp. In some areas of swamp or sewage discharge, we recorded aquatic birds also. At times we recorded some unusual birds in the desert on their return migration. Night herons, purple heron, wryneck, pratincole and flycatchers.

As opined by Jennings, Arabian babbler, Namaqua dove, palm dove, house sparrows and certain other species are extending their range due to introduction of farming in the desert. Around Jabal Jildiyah we recorded 6 resident species of larks. Therefore this square (IA32) could be a very interesting place to carry out a separate study on larks. In fact larks, being the most common and diversified group of birds within the Arabian Desert, do deserve a special attention (Yahya et al in press). Another interesting sighting was that of chukar (*Alectoris chukar*) in Jahbal-Al Laws environs.

While some species like kestrel, griffon vulture, sand partridge, pale crag martin, collared dove, ravens, wheatears and larks were frequently seen; thrushes, owls, pipits and eagles were not so evident.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Prof. A H Abuzinada, Secretary General, for encouragement and Mr M Salamah (NCWCD) for field arrangements. I am also thankful to Mr Michael Jennings for introducing me to the Arabian Desert and for on the spot identification of some new birds.

[The author has given a list of 105 birds. Among these of particular interest to Indian readers is the mention of the grey hypocolins (*Hypocolins ampelinus*), seen as a vagrant by Salim Ali in Kihim (Maharashtra) in the 1930s. I recall Salim telling me that when he saw this bulbul like bird in a thorny scrub jungle he was puzzled beyond measure. He rushed back to his house, a mile away, and returned with his trusted collecting gun. It was only when he had the bird in hand and not in the bush that he was sure of its identity. The other bird in the list which is of interest is the black eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*). Arabia seems to have good patches of forest to be able to provide a home to this species.]



Editor



Birds of Annamalai University Campus, T.N.

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Location

The Annamalai University is located at Annamalai nagar (11°24'N, 79° 44'E) in South Arcot district at an altitude of 5.97 m above MSL and lies 3 km east of the temple-town of Chidambaram, the abode of Lord Nataraja and 60 km south of Pondicherry. The campus on the east abuts on the remnants of the tropical dry evergreen forest that runs by the east coast.

Locality

This unique teaching-cum-residential university stretching over a well-wooded area of about 780 acres boasts apart from its majestic buildings and their environs, a few bosky gardens, two permanent lakes of deep water, vast tracts of barren grassland, an orchard which is a pleasing layout of 25 acres and an agricultural farm of about 100 acres that includes both wetland and gardenland and the irrigation of which is by means of North Rajan Canal System of the Coleroon, a distributary of the Cauvery. In winter, many pockets of semi-permanent reed-covered swamps appear most of which become dry on the advent of summer. The climate is typically tropical with an average annual rainfall of 835 mm received largely from retreating north-east monsoon and annual mean temperature as follows :

Summer	: Max. 37.1°c	Min 36.4°c
Winter	: Max. 21.3°c	Min. 20.1°c

Vegetation

The flora of the campus is marked by a good number of trees both indigenous and exotic. The former includes *Terminalia catappa*, *Lannea coromandelica*, *Albizia lebbek*, *Manilkara hexandra*, *Polyalthia longifolia*, *Cassia fistula*, *Syzygium cumini*, *Wrightia tinctoria*, *Bassia latifolia*, *Calophyllum inophyllum*, *Pongamia glabra*, *Peltophorum pterocarpum*, *Aegle marmelos*, and *Lagerstroemia reginae* besides the ubiquitous neem, banyan and bhendi.

The exotic trees are of lesser diversity but they outnumber the indigenous ones and include *Plumeria rubra*, *Delonix regia*, *Enterolobium saman*, *Spathodea campanulata*, *Gliricidia maculata*, *Thevetia peruviana*, and *Couroupita guianensis* in addition to long established species like tamarind and acacia.

The shrubs are chiefly formed by *Prosopis juliflora*, *Lantana camara*, *Bougainvillea spectabilis*, *Calotropis gigantea*, *Cardiospermum halicacabum*, *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, *Ixora coccinea*, *Jatropha gossypifolia*, and *Ipomaea sp.*

The shrubs and the trees are profusely infected with plant-parasites, the dodder and the mistletoe (*Loranthus sp.*) respectively.

Species-diversity of birds

Though the campus offers a variety of ecological niches, it can be seen from Table II that the species diversity of the bird population is rather limited which can be attributed to the following reasons :

1. Preponderance of exotic trees and shrubs.
2. Artificial gardens and parks laid out just out of consideration for aesthetic appeal with no emphasis on ecological value.
3. A high degree of human activity.
4. The 'biologically dry' lakes of deep water with the plankton population, too scarce to sustain a significant number of lentic fauna, and
5. Persistent treatment of the agricultural fields with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides (esp. Chlorinated hydrocarbons) over years, called for by farm-research and experiments.

Cropping pattern and avifauna

A number of species of the local birdlife rely solely on the dynamics of the agro ecosystem for sustenance and naturally their population and movement are largely in accordance with existing cropping pattern. The influence of cropping pattern on the composition of avifauna is by itself a separate topic that needs to be studied on a long-term basis in a more systematic way. However my casual notes on the birdlife around the experimental farm of the university over several seasons have led to some interesting observations which can be summarized as in Table I.

Table I Cropping Pattern and Avifauna

Sl. No.	Season	Period	Cropping pattern based on	Birds of chief occurrence
I	KHARIF	Jun - Jul to Sep - Oct	Groundnut (Bunch Type)	Crows, common myna, coucal, peafowl, yellow-wattled lapwing, white-headed babbler, rose-ringed parakeet
		Jun - Jul to Aug - Sep	Ragi	Grey partridge, munias, plain wren-warbler
		Jun - Jul to Aug - Sep	Sesame	Common myna, Indian roller, black drongo, ashy swallow shrike.
		Oct - Nov to Jan - Feb	Rice (lowland)	Brahminy kite, pond heron, white-breasted waterhen, egrets, wood sandpiper, bee-eaters, swallows, white-breasted kingfisher, black drongo, warblers, large pied wagtail, munias, baya weaver.



Sl. No	Season	Period	Cropping pattern based on	Birds of chief occurrence
III	ZAID	Feb - Mar to May - June	Rice-fallow Pulses	Grey partridge, common myna, yellow-wattled lapwing, black drongo, Indian roller, ashy swallow shrike, paddy-field pipit, white-backed munia, rose-ringed parakeet, blue rock pigeon, doves, ashy-crowned finch-lark, cattle egret
		Jan - Feb to Jul - Aug	Rice-fallow Cotton	Black drongo, Indian roller, ashy swallow-shrike, grey partridge, common quail, ashy-crowned finch-lark.
		Feb - Mar to Jul - Aug	Jowar	Grey partridge, Indian roller, black drongo, munias, rose ringed parakeet, common quail, baya weaver, ashy swallow shrike, house sparrow, plain wren-warbler.



Check list

The checklist of the birds of Annamalai University campus was based upon observations from 1989 to 1991 with most of the birding done around the faculty of agriculture which physically links the bustling university with the more solemn woody jungles of the Coromandel coast. Much as it would be unwise to project frequency-indices for bird population of so small an area like the one under study, (which is about 780 acres only) I have furnished the population parameter so as to get through to the readers an idea of the basic population pattern of each species that occurs in the campus. (I however wish to add that the frequency scales may be dealt with a bit of caution).

Incidentally, the birds of confirmed identity are only entered in the checklist and the synopsis number has been avoided where the sub-species stands unidentified. (The problem arises particularly in those cases where more than one race are likely to be found and where it is very hard to tell them apart in the field).

It is said that a checklist of birds can never be comprehensive generally speaking and this one too is no exception.

CHECKLIST

Key to Status

R : Resident
W : Winter visitor
LM : Local migrant
PM : Passage migrant
S : Straggler

Key to Frequency

A : Very common (Abundant)
C : Common
O : Occasional
U : Uncommon
X : Rare

b, as suffix : Breeding within the campus observed

Sl. No.	Synopsis No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status & Frequency
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Family : PODICIPEDIDAE

01 0005 Little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* LM C

Family : PHALACROCORACIDAE

02 0028 Little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* W X

Family : ARDEIDAE

03 0036 Grey heron *Ardea cinerea* W U
04 0042 Pond heron *Ardeola grayii* LM A
05 0044 Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis* LM C
06 0047 Smaller egret *Egretta intermedia* W O
07 0049 Little egret *Egretta garzetta* W A
08 0056 Chestnut bitern *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus* LM U

Family : THRESKIORNITHIDAE

09 0070 Black ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* S

Family : ACCIPITRIDAE

10 0124 Black-winged kite *Elaanus caeruleus* R O
11 0133 Pariah kite *Milvus migrans* Rb C
12 0135 Brahminy kite *Haliastur indus* Rb C
13 0138 Shikra *Accipiter badius* R C
14 0185 White-backed vulture *Gyps bengalensis* R C



Sl. No	Synopsis No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status & Frequency
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15 0187 Scavenger vulture *Neophron percnopterus* R C

16 0193 Marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus* W U

Family : PHASIADAE

*7 0246 Grey partridge *Francolinus pondicerianus* Rb C

18 0250 Common quail *Coturnix coturnix* W C

19 0311 Common peafowl *Pavo cristatus* LM U

Family : RALLIDAE

20 0343 White breasted waterhen *Amamiornis phoenicurus* Rb C

Family : RECURVIROSTRIDAE

21 0430 Black winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus* W C

Family : CHARADRIIDAE

Sub-Fam : Charadriinae

22 0366 Red-wattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus* Rb A

23 0370 Yellow wattled lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus* LM U

24 0380 Little ringed plover *Charadrius dubius* W O

Sub-Fam : Scolopacinae

25 0398 Wood sandpiper *Tringa glareola* W C

26 0401 Common sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos* W O

Family : LARIDAE

27 0458 Whiskered tern *Chlidonias hypoleuca* W O

Family : COLUMBIDAE

28 0504 Yellow-legged green pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera* LM O

29 0517 Blue rock pigeon *Columba livia* Rb A

30 0534 Indian ring dove *Streptopelia decaocto* LM C

31 0541 Little brown dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* Rb C

Family : PSITTACIDAE

32 0550 Rose-ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri* Rb A

Sl No	Synopsis No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status & Frequency
Family : CUCULIDAE				
33	0571	Pied crested cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	LM C
34	0573	Common hawk cuckoo	<i>Cuculus varius</i>	R C
35	0584	Indian plaintive cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>	PM U
36	0590	Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i>	Rb C
37	0602	Cuckoo	<i>Centropus stinensis</i>	R C
Family : STRIGIDAE				
Sub-Fam : Tytoninae				
38	0606	Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	Rb C
Sub-Fam : Striginae				
39	0623	Collared scops owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>	R O
40	0627	Great horned owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	R O
41	0652	Spotted owl	<i>Athene brama</i>	Rb A
Family : CAPRIMULGIDAE				
42	0680	Common Indian nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>	R O
Family : APODIDAE				
Sub-fam : Apodinae				
43	0703	House swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	Rb A
44	0707	Palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	Rb A
Family : ALCEDINIDAE				
45	0719	Lesser pied kingfisher	<i>Coryle rudis</i>	W C
46	0724	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	R C
47	0736	White-breasted kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smymensis</i>	R C
48	0739	Black-capped kingfisher	<i>Halcyon pileata</i>	S
Family : MEROPIDAE				
49	0748	Blue-tailed bee eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>	W O
50	0750	Small green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	LM C
Family : CORACIIDAE				
51	0756	Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	Rb A
Family : UPUPIDAE				
52	0765	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Rb A
Family : CAPITONIDAE				
53	0792	Crimson-breasted barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	Rb A
Family : PICIDAE				
54	0820	Lesser golden backed woodpecker	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	R A
55	0847	Yellow fronted pied woodpecker	<i>Picoides maharattensis</i>	R U
56	0852	Brown-crowned pigmy woodpecker	<i>Picoides moluccensis</i>	R O
Family : PITTIDAE				
57	0867	Indian pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>	PM
Family : ALAUDIDAE				
58	0877	Red-winged bush lark	<i>Mirafra erythroptera</i>	S
59	0878	Ashy-crowned finch-lark	<i>Eremopterix grisea</i>	R C



Sl No	Synopsis No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status & Name
Family : HIRUNDINIDAE				
60 a)	0916	Common swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica rustica</i>	W A
b)	0917	Common swallow	<i>H. r. gutturalis</i>	W U
61	0921	Wire tailed swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	W C
62	0927	Red-rumped swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	W U
Family : ORIOLIDAE				
63	0953	Golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	R C
64	0959	Black headed oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>	Rb C
Family : DICRUROIDAE				
65	0963	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	Rb A
Family : ARTAMIDAE				
66	0982	Ashy swallow shrike	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>	LMb C
Family : STURNIDAE				
67	0994	Black-headed myna	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>	R C
68	1006	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Rb A
Family : CORVIDAE				
69	1034	Indian tree-pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	Rb C
70	1049	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	Rb A
71	1057	Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	R A
Family : CAMPEPHAGIDAE				
72	1070	Common wood-shrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	R U
73	1072	Large cuckoo-shrike	<i>Corocina novaehollandiae</i>	R O
74	1093	Small minivet	<i>Pencroctus cinnamomeus</i>	R O
Family : IRENIDAE				
75	1100	Common iora	<i>Aegintha tiphia</i>	R O
76	1107	Jerdon's chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>	R O
Family : PYCNONOTIDAE				
77	1128	Red-vented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	Rb A
78	1138	White-browed bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>	R U
Family : MUSCICAPIDAE				
Sub-fam : Timaliinae				
79	1267	White-headed babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	Rb A
Sub-fam : Monarchinae				
80	1461	Paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	PM? X
Sub-fam : Sylviinae				
81	1498	Streaked fantail warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	W O
82	1511	Plain wren-warbler	<i>Pnnia subblava</i>	Rb C
83	1535	Tailor bird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	Rb A
84	1545	Grasshopper warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	W O
85	1556	Blyth's reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	W C
86	1557	Paddy field warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	W C
87	--	Lesser whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	W U
88	--	Dull green leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	W O

Sub-fam : **TURDINAE**

89	1661	Magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	Rb	A
90	1720	Indian robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	Rb	A

Family : **MOTACILLIDAE**

91	1859	Paddy field pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	Rb	A
92	1884	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	W	O
93	1885	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	W	U
94	1891	Large pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	Rb	A

Family : **DICAETIDAE**

95	1899	Tickell's flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>	Rb	A
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Family : **NECTARINIIDAE**

96	1907	Purple-rumped sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>	Rb	A
97	1911	Loten's sunbird	<i>Nectarinia lotenia</i>	R	U
98	1917	Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	Rb	C

Family : **PLOCEIDAE**Sub-fam : **Passerinae**

99	1938	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Rb	A
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Sub-fam : **Ploceinae**

100	1957	Baya weaver bird	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	Rb	C
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Sub-fam : **Estrildinae**

101	1966	White-throated munia	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>	LM	O
102	1968	White-backed munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>	Rb	C
103	1974	Spotted munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	R	O
104	1978	Black-headed munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>	R	O

Acknowledgement

Thanks are due to Mr.R. Rajagopal, B.E., for providing me with the vital geographic and meteorological data of the university.



Birds in the Nilgiris

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I had hoped to visit the Nilgiris for some time and so when invited by a friend residing near Ooty to spend a week there, I took the opportunity. After the trip, while going through the literature I found that very little was available on the birdlife of Ooty environs which is one of the most popular hill-resorts of our country. Hence this brief account of the birds noted during my short stay from 13-20 Sept.94 may be of some interest to visiting bird-lovers. It was an altogether favourable time for watching birds with the fine weather, lush post-monsoon vegetation and the low density of tourists during the former part of the stay.

Birds en route to Ooty

From Kallar at the base of the ghats, the road winds up through broken toothill country with dry nallah beds and deciduous forests which are exceedingly degraded. About 1000 m above MSL is Burliar with moist deciduous and semi evergreen patches in varying stages of degradation. Next is Coonoor at 1850 m where fragmented sholas start to appear and finally the road reaches Ooty at 2240 m. At Kallar I noted white browed bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*), babbler spp, etc while yellow browed bulbul (*Hypsipetes indicus*), blue winged parakeet (*Psittacula columboides*), hill myna (*Gracula religiosa*), purple sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*) and numerous lorikeets (*Loriculus vernalis*) were observed in between Burliar and Coonoor. The lower slopes are presumably more diverse and richer in avifauna than the higher ones but I could not manage to get down and watch birds more leisurely. Visiting birders might find it vastly interesting, both in terms of bird richness and scenic splendour to get down at Kallar and walk up to Coonoor.

Birds around our cottage

We were stationed at Thalayatmund (c.2300 m above MSL) on the outskirts of Ooty town where our cottage was

situated half-way up a hill. It was quiet with cultivated land below and plum orchards around. The rest of the hill was covered by small wattle plantations, stunted jungle trees and dense thorny thickets of *Rubus* spp with sheet rocky outcrops interspersed. A pair of kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) had the hill as their domain and most of the day could be found soaring and hovering together, occasionally joined by a third bird. Small groups of dusky crag martins (*Hirundo concolor*) flew around in tireless pursuit of insects until at dusk they roosted. Dashing along at terrific velocity, the birds would brake abruptly in mid air and alight in the horizontal fissures in the steep cliff face, where they squatted nightjar fashion. Thus seated they would fidget their wings uttering shrill chirpy notes. Two crag martins (*H. rupestris*) with dirty white underparts, dark undertail coverts and tail were noted to hawk insects along with the former species. Other birds included a solitary rufousbacked shrike (*Lanius schach*), two pairs of pied bush chat (*Saxicola caprata*), flocks of jungle mynas, spotted doves, grey tits, red-vented and red whiskered bulbuls around the cultivation and Nilgiri laughing thrushes (*Garrulax cachinnans*), Bourdillon's blackbird (*Turdus merula bourdillonii*) and white-eyes on the higher well-wooded slopes. One day seeing a pair of ashy wren warblers mobbing a cat uttering frantic alarm notes, I rushed to investigate and found a tiny tailless fledgeling perched forlornly in a well-folliaged tree. A pipit spp was noted to frequent the grassy slopes and by their field marks seemed to be *Anthus nilghiriensis*. A pair of spotted munias were busy building their nest in a leafy shrub and once I saw the female in invitation posture (?) with lowered head and rapidly quivering tail to which the male responded by hopping on it and copulating.

Birds of the town and vicinity

Prime bird habitat in the town in its strict sense is almost non-existent but the grassy expanses of the race course, the



well-wooded botanical garden and the swampy edges of the lake afford likely retreats. The race course is haunted by large flocks of jungle mynas, few common mynas and innumerable house sparrows not to speak of that indefatigable commensal of man the crow. Three or four pariah kites, and once an adult Brahminy kite were noted soaring above.

The 22 ha garden is tree-filled and correspondingly has a vast variety of birds inhabiting it. Two out of three times I visited it, the garden was deserted with few tourists and the whole area was literally teeming with birds while call-notes, flight-notes, and songs echoed everywhere! White-eyes, greyheaded flycatchers, grey tits, small sunbirds and velvet fronted nuthatches were numerous and exceedingly active while black bulbuls flew from tall eucalyptus trees whistling joyously. Among others were blackbird, gold fronted chloropsis, small green barbet, koel etc. A single small blue kingfisher sat by the lily pond while a male magpie robin sang near the rear of the garden. Out of the birds recorded here were relatively uncommon species like black and orange flycatcher (*Muscicapa nigrorufa*), Nilgiri laughing thrush, white throated fantail flycatcher (*Rhipidura albicollis albogularis*), Nilgiri flycatcher (*Muscicapa albicaudata*) etc. Having only a very scanty acquaintance with the black and orange flycatcher, I was pleasantly surprised to find it not uncommon here. It is generally thought to be a secretive bird, but here they were at their 'un-skulkiest' best and allowed me to approach as close as 4 m. Three birds were seen - a pair and their fledgeling which had duller colours, indistinct white eye-ring and stumpy tail. The tail was constantly flicked up and down and the birds often hopped about in the leaf litter. The female was once heard to utter a low reedy whistle reminiscent of the rufous tailed flycatcher's call. Otherwise the normal call was a rapid chi-ri-ri-ri heard frequently. Likewise it seems that Nilgiri laughing thrushes which belong to a tribe of inveterate skulkers have adapted themselves to tolerate the presence of man. Some of them foraged in the lawn quite oblivious of my presence nearby. Such confiding demeanour was clearly due to the paucity of tourists as made clear by my third visit when the garden was crammed with hordes of tourists, noisily making their way through the

pathways. Birds were almost completely absent and as I strolled around, I noted that they had retreated to the quiet compounds of the Hebron school and Rajbhavan adjoining the garden. Here was a typical case of the pressure that tourism has on birds in a locality.

The irregular L-shaped 2 km long lake and its adjoining areas (c 2000 m) are really noteworthy, particularly the side flanking the railway embankment where there is a fairly lush growth of reeds and bulrushes in addition to some mudbanks. Here I noted Indian moorhens, (*Gallinula chloropus*) which at a very conservative estimate numbered around 35. There were birds of all plumages from adults in their handsome breeding dress to sober brown juveniles.

Downy black chicks were also noted swimming and pecking at floating vegetation. As the sun was out shining, most birds took refuge in the dense reed beds to rest and preen. Occasionally harsh 'creek' calls were heard. There were also about 15 whitebreasted waterhens feeding actively along with 20 odd common sandpipers and a few green sandpipers. Dabchicks numbering around 30 swam around in various parts of the lake and many were in breeding plumage. The shrill Kii-li-li call was heard throughout. Three tiny downy chicks swam along with the adults. Other birds of the lake area included a solitary pond heron, pied bush chat, large pied wagtail, grey wagtail etc not to speak of large numbers of crows and mynas. An adult Brahminy kite was seen fishing. The path circling the lake which leads to the deer park also offers good opportunities for birding. Apart from all these, the town still has several grassy downs and shady compounds where many of the birds mentioned earlier can be seen.

Birds on the trek-routes

Our first trek was a short one, when we climbed up the steep thorny path skirting the Thalayattmundu hill - reached the lower and upper reservoirs fringed with tall eucalyptus and finally ended near the thorny stretches just below Doddabetta peak (c. 2623 m). Birdlife was good - blackbirds were especially common and flocks were found to gather to feed on the wild raspberry (*Rubus spp*) which abounded here. Both Nilgiri house swallows (*Hirundo tahitica*) and dusky crag martins hawked near the peak. Greyheaded flycatchers, rufousbacked shrikes and dull green leaf warbler were seen in the undergrowth of the eucalyptus plantations.

The next trek, a fairly arduous one started near the rolling grasslands of the Wenlock downs, continued along 6th mile and then ran amidst dense plantations of pine on the bank of the Kamaraj Sagar reservoir. We lost our way in between and finally turned up at Kuruttikundi near a dense shola called Governor's shola. The whole walk which amounted some 25+ kilometres took us along a number of habitats, each of which had its own share of birds in sharp contrast to the pine plantations where not even a single species was seen or heard. The edges of the reservoir had common sandpipers, wagtails etc and an occasional red wattled lapwing was noted. At Governor's shola we heard the calls of



THE NILGIRIS

Nilgiri wood pigeon, scimitar babbler, black and orange flycatcher and Malabar whistling thrush (?).

The third trek which was undoubtedly the most rewarding started from the Pykara dam, travelled downstream along the edge of the river which made its course through grassy meadows, dense riparian stretches and plantations to end up near the Glenmorgan dam. Birds were numerous especially laughing thrushes, black bulbuls, flycatchers etc. The path at certain parts were lined with dense stands of hill guava (*Rhodomyrtos tomentosa*) and strobilanthes. Here I noted rufousbellied shortwings (*Brachypteryx major*) on two occasions. A solitary white-breasted kingfisher was seen near a buffalo wallow fringing the river. At Glenmorgan head works I saw large cormorants nesting in dead trees in the reservoir. There were 42 nests and the birds appeared to be incubating. House swallows were nesting (?) under the eaves of the buildings there. At the upper view point area (c.1970 m) I heard the call of the three-toed woodpecker and later saw one clambering about in a tree nearby. Both Tickell's leaf warbler and largebilled leaf warbler were tentatively identified. Around the hill slopes there, the Neela kurinji (*Strobilanthes kunthianuz*) had flowered enshrouding the whole area with a veil of delicate blue. From far below grey jungle fowls crowed their farewell to the ending day.

To conclude, out of the 58 species recorded 47 were noted in the town environs. In fact 30 species were observed in the 22 ha garden alone. It seems that these birds have more or less adapted to survive in the changing situations but only time can tell their ultimate fate. The fate of some others like rufous bellied shortwing, Nilgiri wood pigeon, wood cock etc (requiring primary shola habitat) which now survive in isolated and fast-shrinking pockets is anybody's guess. Population explosion of house sparrows and crows can be a major problem and as the unrelenting tourists make their way to yet another unexplored part of this beautiful land, these birds follow them at their wake, eventually to settle and flourish there. Also with the ever burgeoning tourism pressure comes the establishment of large holiday resorts and other mega schemes. All these are taking place in a totally unprecedented rate, and that too in a land scarred by years of unscientific forestry operations. Even the few remaining patches of verdant sholas are enough to leave one wondering about the erstwhile splendour of the mountains when they used to be clothed by unbroken sholas and lush grasslands. All we can do is to protect the remnant patches without further intervention of man.



Birds of the Amravathi Area and Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary

DHANANJAY KATJU, Centre of Wildlife & Ornithology, A.M.U., Aligarh 202 002 (UP)

This checklist is the result of a 2-day visit in Mid-October '91 to the Amravathi range which forms the south-eastern portion of the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, as well as to the adjoining Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary. The former is in Tamil Nadu while the latter is part of Kerala state.

The area covered by me consisted of low, rocky, hills with the low-lying areas covered by a semi-arid thorn-scrub type of vegetation (predominantly *Acacia* and *Prosopis* sp.) with a scattering of deciduous trees.

In the Amravathi area, birding was mainly done along the banks of the 'Amravathi reservoir', and in an adjoining area known locally as 'Pongan Odai'. The riparian forests along the Chinnar river presented an interesting contrast to the surrounding vegetation, with their tall trees and closed-canopies. It was in this portion of the Chinnar WLS that birdwatching was mainly concentrated.

In all, 27 species of birds were observed, representing 15 families. Of special interest is a sighting of the bluebearded bee-eater (*Nyctyornis athertoni*) in the 'Pongan Odai' area. This area, as already mentioned is dominated by semi-arid thorn-scrub. Ali and Ripley (1989), on the other hand, state that this particular Bee-eater mainly affect "secondary evergreen and moist deciduous forest biotope". Two

sightings of the green imperial pigeon (*Ducula aenea*) were confined to the riverine belt along the Chinnar river.

This check-list as is evident is far from complete. The Amravathi and Chinnar areas are of very great ornithological interest and require to be studied by keener birdwatchers than myself. The Chinnar riverine belt is also one of the last few remaining areas where one can sight the endangered Grizzled Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa macroura*) and hence is a 'priority' area from the 'conservation' point of view.

A Systematic check-list of the Birds of the Amravathi Area and Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary

Family : ARDEIDAE

- | | | |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Grey heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> |
| 2 | Pond heron | <i>Ardeola grayii</i> |
| 3 | Little egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> |

Family : ACCIPITRIDAE

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 4 | Crested hawk-eagle | <i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i> |
| 5 | Black eagle | <i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i> |
| 6 | Crested serpent eagle | <i>Spilornis cheela</i> |

Family : COLUMBIDAE

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 7 | Green imperial pigeon | <i>Ducula aenea</i> |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------|



Family : **PSITTACIDAE**

- 8 Roseringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri*
 9 Blossomheaded parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*

Family : **CAPRIMULGIDAE**

- 10 Common Indian nightjar (HO) *Caprimulgus asiaticus*

Family : **ALCEDINIDAE**

- 11 Lesser pied kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*
 12 Whitebreasted kingfisher *Halcyon smymensis*

Family : **MEROPIIDAE**

- 13 Chestnutheaded bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti*
 14 Green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*
 15 Bluebearded bee-eater *Nyctornis atherton*

Family : **PICIDAE**

- 16 Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense*
 17 Blackbacked woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes festivus*

Family : **ORIOIDAE**

- 18 Blackheaded oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*

Family : **DICRURIDAE**

- 19 Whitebellied drongo *Dicrurus caeruleus*

Family : **CAMPEPHAGIDAE**

- 20 Scarlet minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*
 21 Small minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*

Family : **IRENIDAE**

- 22 Common iora *Aegithina tiphia*

Family : **PYCNONOTIDAE**

- 23 Redvented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*
 24 Whitebrowed bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus*

Family : **MOTACILLIDAE**

- 25 Grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
 26 Large pied wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*

Family : **NECTARINIDAE**

- 27 Purplerumped sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica*



Reference

Ali, S. & S. D. Ripley (1989). Compact handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan. Delhi : Oxford University Press.



A Check-list of the Winter Birds of the Kailana-Bijolai Area, Jodhpur

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The present check-list has been compiled as a result of observations of avifauna of the Kailana-Bijolai area, which is situated about 8 km west of Jodhpur town. It comprises low, undulating, boulder-strewn hills, with *Euphorbia caducifolia* and *Acacia senegal* as the predominant species of plants. Approximately in the centre of the area is an artificial reservoir known as the Kailana lake, which attracts migratory waterbirds.

Jodhpur city (26° 19'N, 73° 8'E, elevation 241 m) lies in the state of Rajasthan at the eastern fringe of the Great Indian Desert in Western India. It has a climate characterized by uncertain and variable rains and extremes of temperature.

Out of the 79 families of avifauna present in the Indian subcontinent, 36 were represented in the area surveyed. The **Muscicapidae** (12 sp.), the **Anatidae** (10 sp.), and the **Accipitridae** (10 sp.) were the top-ranking families with respect to 'number of species'.

Five species of vultures were observed during the course of field work. The most abundant of these seemed to be the Indian longbilled vulture (*Gyps indicus*), followed closely by the whitebacked vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*). The king

vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*) and the cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) appeared to be present in low numbers. Interesting sightings were those of the rock bunting (*Emberiza cia*) and all the male morphs of the pied chat (*Oenanthe picata*).

The avifaunal observations listed in this report were made as part of a month-long behavioural study of Hanuman langurs from 18th December 1993 to 16th January 1994, in the same area.

Checklist of the Winter Birds of The Kailana Area (Jodhpur)

No.	Name	Scientific Name	Status
Family : PODICIPEDIDAE			
01	Little grebe	<i>Podiceps ruficollis</i>	R
Family: PHALACROCORACIDAE			
02	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	RM
03	Little cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	RM
Family : ARDEIDAE			
04	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	RM
05	Pond neron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	R

06	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	RM
07	Large egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	RM
08	Smaller egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>	RM
09	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	R

Family: THRESKIORNITHIDAE

10	White ibis	<i>Threkiornis aethiopica</i>	R
11	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	RM

Family: ANATIDAE

12	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	M
13	Common teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	M
14	Spotbilled duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>	RM
15	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	RM
16	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	M
17	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	M
18	Shoveller	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	M
19	Common pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	M
20	White-eyed pochard	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	RM
21	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	M

Family: ACCIPITRIDAE

22	Blackwinged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	R
23	Pariah kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	R
24	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	R
25	Eastern steppe eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>	M
26	Greater spotted eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>	RM
27	King vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>	R
28	Cinereous vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	RM
29	Indian longbilled vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>	R
30	Indian whitebacked vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	R
31	Egyptian vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	RM

Family: FALCONIDAE

32	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	RM
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Family: PHASIANIDAE

33	Grey partridge	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	R
34	Common peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	R

Family: RALLIDAE

35	Whitebreasted waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	R
36	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	RM
37	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	RM

Family: RECURVIROSTRIDAE

38	Blackwinged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	R
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Family: BURHINIDAE

39	Stone curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	R
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Family: CHARADRIIDAE

40	Whitetailed lapwing	<i>Vanellus leucurus</i>	M
41	Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	R
42	Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	RM
43	Blacktailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	M

44	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	RM
45	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	M
46	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	M
47	Common sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>	RM
48	Fantail snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	M

Family: LARIDAE

49	Indian river tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	R
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Family: PTEROCLIDIDAE

50	Painted sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles indicus</i>	R
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Family: COLUMBIDAE

51	Blue rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	R
52	Indian ring dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	R
53	Red turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	R
54	Little brown dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	R

Family: PSITTACIDAE

55	Roseringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	R
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Family: STRIGIDAE

56	Spotted owl	<i>Athene brama</i>	R
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Family: APODIDAE

57	House swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	RM
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Family: ALCEDINIDAE

58	Lesser pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	R
59	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	RM
60	Whitebreasted kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smymensis</i>	R

Family: MEROPIDAE

61	Green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	R
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Family: CORACIDAE

62	Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	R
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Family: UPUPIDAE

63	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	RM
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Family: PICIDAE

64	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	M
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Family: ALAUDIDAE

65	Ashycrowned finch-lark	<i>Eremopterix grisea</i>	M
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Family: HIRUNDINIDAE

66	Dusky crag martin	<i>Hirundo concolor</i>	R
67	Indian cliff swallow	<i>Hirundo fluviicola</i>	R
68	Redrumped swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	RM

Family: LANIIDAE

69	Grey shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	RM
70	Rufousbacked shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	R

Family: DICRURIDAE

71	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	R
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Family: **STURNIDAE**

72	Brahminy myna	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>	R
73	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	M
74	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	R

Family: **CDRVIDAE**

75	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	R
76	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	R

Family: **CAMPEPHAGIDAE**

77	Small minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	R
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Family: **PYCNONOTIDAE**

78	Whitecheeked bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>	R
79	Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	R

Family: **MUSCICAPIDAE**

80	Common babbler	<i>Turdoides caudatus</i>	R
81	Large grey babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>	R
82	Redbreasted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa parva</i>	M
83	Whitebrowed fantail flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	R
84	Rufous-fronted wren-warbler	<i>Prinia buchanani</i>	R
85	Tailor bird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	R
86	Lesser whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	M
87	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	M
88	Bluethroat	<i>Erithacus svecicus</i>	RM
89	Black redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochrurus</i>	RM
90	Brown rock chat	<i>Cercomela fusca</i>	R

91	Desert wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	RM
92	Pied chat	<i>Oenanthe picata</i>	R
93	Indian robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	R

Family: **MOTACILLIDAE**

94	White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	RM
95	Large pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	R

Family: **NECTARINIIDAE**

96	Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	R
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Family: **PLDCEIDAE**

97	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	R
98	Whitethroated munia	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>	R

Family: **FRINGILLIDAE**

99	Rock bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	RM
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R = Resident. Also covers local migrant, i.e. birds that breed in one part of the Subcontinent in one season and move to other parts within the country in a different season.

M = Migrant (extralimital, chiefly long-distance)

RM = Resident with migratory populations (subspecies)

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New Record of Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* In Deepor Beel, Assam



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Deepor beel covering an area of around 40 sq. km lies 26°03'26" N to 26°09'26" N Lat., and 90°36'39" E to 90°41'25" E Long. and at an altitude of 165-186 ft. above MSL. The beel has been recognised as the 17th National Wetland of India and also included in the IWRB's 'DIRECTORY OF ASIAN WETLANDS'. A portion of the beel has been declared as a Wildlife Sanctuary in the year 1989 covering an area of 4.14 sq. km.

On 16 December 1994, we visited Deepor beel in connection with the regular monitoring of waterbirds in the beel, we noticed two unusual storks along with two greater adjutant stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*) at 11.36 am in the shore area of the northern side (towards Assam Engineering College and Gauhati University) of the beel. The storks (two

in number) were smaller than the greater adjutant stork and lesser adjutant stork and slim in body structure. We used our binocular and found that the body color is completely black, with red beak and white belly and confirmed the stork as black stork *Ciconia nigra*. This is the first record of the black stork in Deepor beel and incidentally in western Assam. It may be mentioned here that the *Ciconia nigra* are recorded only in Majuli area (26°02'N, 94°17'E) and some isolated pockets in eastern Assam. The greater and lesser adjutant storks are common to Deepor beel, while the open bill stork is a vagrant. The recent record of *Ciconia nigra* in Deepor beel indicates a new western range extension of the species in Assam.





Rare Sighting of Grey Shrike in Arippa, Kerala

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It was a foggy winter morning on 26.12.1993. I was watching forest birds at Arippa Ammayambalam pacha, a small evergreen patch about 52 kilometers from Thiruvananthapuram city (capital of Kerala). The birds were very active. I was watching a hunting party of birds in a reed jungle near the forest path at 9 am.

Orange minivet, fairy bluebird, greyheaded bulbul, yellowbrowed bulbul, rubythroated bulbul, Malabar trogon, bronze drongo, pigmy woodpecker and racket-tailed drongo, were the members of that hunting party. A little later a bulbul sized bird appeared and rested on a bush top (*Acacia insia* wild) near the forest path. I observed the bird for half an hour. After careful observation through the binoculars I could make out the colours of the bird. The head was silvery grey. A broad black band from forehead and bill backward across the eye to ear coverts; the beak was heavy and hooked. The underparts were pure white. The graduated tail with black

and white feathers and wings were black (a pure white patch was seen in flight). The remaining part of the body was silver grey. The bird was a grey shrike (*Lanius excubitor lahtora* Sykes). After a short rest the bird caught a dragonfly in flight and came back to the same perch. The flight of the bird was very fast and very quick. The bird was silent.

In Kerala is the grey shrike a rare winter visitor? The early sightings of the bird were from the northern part of the State (Wayanad and Parambikulam). Status, distribution and habit of the grey shrike in Kerala is not well known. More information is needed. The sighting of the grey shrike at Arippa is the first south Kerala record. Brown shrike (*Lanius cristatus cristatus* Linnaeus) is a winter visitor of Arippa. It was seen here from September to April. Rufousbacked shrike (*Lanius schach caniceps* blyth) is a local migrant of Arippa.



Alternate use of Nest by Little Brown Dove And Indian Robin

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In my house in the Morena district of Madhya Pradesh, there is an electricity meter in the varandah. Since I occupied this house in October 1992, a little brown dove laid eggs twice in the nest built on the meter. The nest was made of loosely arranged small twigs in typical dove style.

The first laying of two white eggs took place in April 1993 and the second clutch of two eggs was laid in February 1994. On both occasions I found broken eggs on the ground a few days after the laying had taken place, the culprit may be a gust of wind or the house gecko.

After her second futile attempt to rear a family, the little brown dove stopped visiting the nest in the last week of February 1994, and in her place, an Indian robin was seen constructing a nest using the dove's nest as the base on the meter. The nesting material used by the robin included small, thin sticks arranged in a semi-circle against the wall on which the electricity meter was hung; cotton and other vegetable

fibres used as a pad in the hollow and on the edge of the semi-circular nest; pieces of silver-white paper and mud-like material.

The Indian robin laid three spotted greenish-white eggs on 2 April 1994 and began to incubate them. When I arrived at my house on 13 May 1994 after a period of about one month, there were neither eggs nor nestlings. The robin's nest was still intact on the meter. During the Indian robin's activities in the early days of incubation, the little brown dove was not sighted anywhere near the nest or in the varandah. The robin obviously knew, before building the nest, that the little brown dove had deserted it for good.

Surprisingly a pair of little brown doves again began to visit the nest, and without making any modification to the robin's nest, laid two white eggs on 15 May 1994. The female began to incubate them till 25 May 1994, when a dusty storm destroyed the nest and the eggs.



Possible Predation of Blacknaped Hare by Great Horned Owl *Bubu Bubo* in The Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, Nannaj (Solapur), Maharashtra

SATISH KUMAR, Grassland Ecology Project, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Dr Salim Ali Chowk Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Bombay 400 023

I was moving along the transect for bird census in a plantation dominated by *Azadirachta indica* and *Albizia*

lebbeck trees, when I saw 15-16 house crows and two jungle crows flying and calling above the trees. When approached,

a great horned owl *Bubo bubo* flew/flushed which was feeding in the shade of a *Zyzyphus* besides a tall dried grass patch (height over 1m) of *Cymbopogon martinii*. The crows followed this bird of prey up to 60 metres where it landed on bare rock under the shade of a tree. A blacknaped hare *Lepus nigricollis nigricollis* was lying under the *Zyzyphus* tree, half of which was eaten away.

The owl had dragged the kill three meters away from the actual killing spot where the alimentary canal/gut of the hare was thrown and the grass stalks were stained with blood. The nose of the prey was still bleeding as it had been torn off by the owl, probably with its talons. The exact time was 07:20 h, about one hour after sunrise on July, 1992. After one hour I revisited the spot but the owl did not come to the kill again.

Had the hare been killed by other large predators of the area like wolf *Canis lupus*, jackal *Canis aureus* or even stray dogs *Canis familiaris*, they would not have left it half eaten, so I presume it was killed by the great horned owl. A pair of owls was seen in a slightly open area of this wooded plot of the Sanctuary throughout the year, utilizing the plantation as a refuge during daytime - resting under tree shade and coming out into the surrounding grazing land after sunset. The hare was killed in the territory of the bird.

According to the description given in 'Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan' by Roberts (1991 edition), the food of this species comprises mainly field rats and mice. The bird also eats the remains of birds like peafowl, francolin and roller killed by others. Its food also includes reptiles, frogs, crabs and large insects.



The Nest of Ashy Wren Warbler (*Prinia socialis*)

R. VENKATA RAMANAN, Principal, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Vidyashram, Nird Campus, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad 500 030

In mid-September 1994, I was taking a walk around the campus at 5 pm. I observed an ashy wren warbler flying away from a thicket of long grass that had grown wild.

The bird had tried to attach about 12-15 stalks of grass together using fibres with some glue like material and cobwebs. From September 16, 1994, I started observing them morning and evening. The bird was busy completing the nest. On 20th September, the nest was complete, an oblong pear shaped nest with a wide circular entrance.

On the sixth day morning, i.e. the 21st I saw one egg. On the 7th day there were two brick red eggs with a dark ring round the broad end.

Now the question is whether this type of nest is often made by the ashy wren warbler. The 'Book of Indian Birds' by Salim Ali (Eleventh edition) describes two types of nests (1) like the tailor bird, in a funnel of stitched leaves; (2) an oblong purse of woven fibres tacked and bound with cobweb to the supporting leaves of a low bush.

The book does not mention a nest slung between grass stalks, and I thought this information may elicit a response from others.



Common Bustard-quail in My House

SURESH C. SHARMA, Gokal Nagar, Rohtak Road, Sonapat 131 001, Haryana

On 10 November 1994, on returning home, after spending several hours at Okhla (New Delhi), with A.J. Urfi and Asad, studying marsh harriers and waterfowl, I got absorbed in the Handbook to confirm some information. It was around 21.00 hours. Suddenly, a round buff ball of feathers of the size of a sparrow on the pile of lawn mowings attracted my attention. Yes, it was a tiny quail trying to hide itself from me. I looked at the illustrations in the Handbook for identification of this quail. To my surprise, the bird had entered by room and was making an effort to fly up the corner only to fall back on the floor. I gently threw a small towel on it and caught it in my hand. After studying all the details, including its three toes, I confirmed it to be a male common bustard-quail (*Turnix suscitator*). I put it into a rat trap to protect it from

cats. I heard intermittent feeble calls 'purr'. It must have been from the female bustard-quail which was searching for its mate in my 300 sq. yards home garden (a sort of shrubbery with a small lawn). But the male from the rat trap did not reciprocate. In the morning, I took out the male quail and again looked at the illustration and other details in the Handbook which assured me of its correct identification. As I placed it on my palm, it first hesitated to fly but on instigation it flew almost vertically to cross a 16 feet high wall. When I left my house at 07.15 hrs, my wife called me back, "Your quail is here". The female was still in the flower-bed. By 09.00 hrs she too had gone. It may be mentioned that my house is in a densely populated area with concrete buildings galore.





The Song of the Brown Shrike

PRAVEEN J, 12/799(2), Ambadi, K Medu PO., Palakkad 678 013, Kerala

Since moving into my new residence in 1991, I have been in close acquaintance with a brown shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) which spent its winter days near my house. In a peep through my bedroom window, I could spot it perched bolt upright on weeds near the fence barely ten feet away. Arriving by the last week of September it is very noisy then, announcing itself by harsh ear-splitting tree-pie like chatters. Soon it calms down and could be seen waiting patiently on a relatively high branch for any small unwary prey to move.

While watching my feathered friend closely, I found that it has a long chirruping song of low tone. The song notes match somewhat with the magpie robin's symphonies, but the long melodious notes are absent. On closer examination, it was found that the bird does not open its bill during the process but a regular bubbling of the throat and a rhythmic flicking of its tail was all I could see. This ventriloquistic song

was usually uttered during mid-day (between 10.00 and 16.00 hrs). I have heard it during the last three winters.

The brown shrike, a winter visitor to Kerala, is known to produce only harsh chatters lasting four to five seconds. This unique melody has not been recorded in any of the books. I would like to know if any of the readers have noted such calls.

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Occurrence of the White Eyed Pochard or Ferruginous Pochard In Kanha Tiger Reserve



RAVI SHANKAR KANOJE, Forest Ranger (Project Tiger Kanha National Park), Post Mukki, Via Baihar, Dist. Balghat 481 111 (MP)

On 1st November 1994, I was looking at the Basinkhar Tank (22°7' N and 80°47' E) for the arrival of the migratory ducks with 7 x 50 binoculars in the Buffer Zone adjacent to the Southern boundary of the core area of the Kanha Tiger Reserve. Basinkhar Tank which is spread over 9 hectares and is 3 metres deep with emergent aquatic plants, harbours various resident birds like cattle egret, little egret, Indian pond heron, redwattled lapwing, black winged stilt, little grebe.

A reddish brown duck with a white iris drew my attention. On close observation I found that it was a white-eyed pochard or ferruginous pochard (*Aythya nyroca*).

This is the most widespread and abundant of our migratory ducks (Ali, S. 1979). This duck has not been included in the Checklist of the Birds of Kanha Tiger Reserve by Newton, Breeden and Norman (1986). They recorded 225 species of birds including observations of Panwar, Guntert and Homberger (1973), Anderson (1979) and Ranjit Singh (1983). This is the first record of the white-eyed pochard or ferruginous pochard in the Kanha Tiger Reserve.

I am thankful to Shri Malsingh Dhurve for his assistance and cooperation.

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Dr Abraham Verghese and I set out at 08.00 hours on 17.12.1994 to scour the lake at the West End. The weather was bright and sunny. The birds on display were:

Purple heron (*Ardea purpurea*)

Coot (*Fulica atra*).

It is interesting to note that this bird is called a Moorhen in Sri Lanka.

Purple moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*).

This bird is called the purple coot in Sri Lanka.

Little cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)

Two birds sitting singly with wings outstretched. Given the right environment, this bird should be seen in large flocks as in Sri Lanka.

Small blue kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*).

In Sri Lanka this bird is called the common kingfisher, which title should be given to the white breasted kingfisher found in abundance.

Little egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Cattle egret (*Bulbulcus ibis*) - Non-breeding plumage with yellow bill.

Pond heron (*Ardeola grayii*)

Large pied wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*).

A pair seen in the company of a grey wagtail (*Motacilla caspica*)

Marsh harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*).

A female or juvenile with a rounded tail and creamy buff cap on the head.

Pariah kites and a Brahminy kite took to the air with the thermals

Pied kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*). 3 birds resting after foraging.

Ashy wren warbler (*Prinia socialis*)

Small green barbet. The large green barbet is very close to the brown headed barbet of Sri Lanka.

Tickells flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*)

White-breasted kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)

Blyth's warbler

It was observed that the Lal Bagh tank has become a dumping ground for dried flowers in plastic bags, also an

Birding in Lalbagh and Bellandur

ELMO ALLES, 11/2 Boyd Place, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

outlet for sewage. More than half the tank is now grass and mud covered, reducing the aquatic resources for the birds.

A concerted clean up should be launched by the Departments, NGOs and voluntary bodies to preserve this beautiful tank.

BIRDWATCHING IN BELLANDUR WITH ZAFAR FUTEHALLY AND MEMBERS OF THE MERLIN NATURE CLUB

Sightings from 07.00 hours to 11.00 hours

Common swallow

Brown shrike

Blyth's warbler

Ashy wren warbler

Black drongo

Paddyfield pipit - more dumpy than the rock pipit

Red rumped swallow

Black winged kite - a beautiful sight when hovering. The wings seem to be dancing.

Spotted dove

Streaked fantail warbler

Male montague harrier and female. A winter visitor.

Red wattled lapwing

Brahminy kite - Adult and juvenile

Red spotted munia - Male. Brilliant in the sunshine

Pied bush chat and female

Shikra

Small green barbet

Red turtle dove - rare in Sri Lanka

Franklins warbler

Wiretailed swallow

Indian wren warbler

Indian lark

The habitat was most appreciated by the writer. Such vast open spaces available so close to the city is a great boon to Birdwatchers.



White-backed Vulture, AMEEN AHMED, Ghouse Building, Horpet Main Road, Tumkur 572 101

Ameen Ahmed wants to know if there are any sightings of the white-backed vulture (*Gyps benghalensis*) south of

Precis of Notes Received

Devarayana Durga Hill, about 16 km away from Tumkur town. The habitat consists of tropical forest and there is a nesting colony of these birds "on the virtually inaccessible cliffs on the eastern side of the Devarayana Durga hill, i.e.

below the Yoga Narasimha Swamy Temple". He has been watching these nests for about three years.

Scaly-bellied Green Woodpecker/Green Crowned Pigmy Woodpecker A BHOOPATHY, Adviser, Kotagiri Wildlife & Environment Association, Door No.27/111-1, Old Hostel Road, Kotagiri 643 217

Bhoopathy writes to say that the comments by V Santaram on the check list of the birds of Longwood Shola, Vol.34, No.5, Sept-Oct 1994 about the scaly-bellied green woodpecker (*Picus squamatus*) and the green crowned pigmy woodpecker (*Picoides canicapillus*) are helpful. But he says that he has checked the details of the green crowned pigmy woodpecker carefully in the books and he comes to the conclusion that it was indeed a green crowned pigmy woodpecker. He says quite rightly that new pressures on the habitats are leading to the extension of the range of several species. "For example, recently we have gathered a new record about (the) little pied flycatcher (*Muscicapa*

westermanni Rothschild) which was published in our Newsletter Vol.34, No.1, March-April, 1994".

In Search of a Pitta, BRIJ KISHOR GUPTA, The Coimbatore Zoological park & Conservation Centre, Pioneer House, Peelamedu, Coimbatore 641 004, Tamil Nadu

I guess we've all heard about Pittas - birds with long legs and a very short tail, and the feathers a riot of colour. The 23 species of pittas live in Australia, Southern and Eastern Asia and Africa.

I met this brilliant bird in the humid and dark forest floor of Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary where the undergrowth was thick, and the ground littered with broken branches and rotting leaves. I heard its familiar and distinctive call - a loud, clear double whistle, wheet-tew ... wheet-tew.

Next morning the pitta treated us to a demonstration of that delicate skill - picking up a snail with its beak, cleverly hitting the victim against a stone, opening the shell and feasting upon the flesh.



Correspondence

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS

Annual Report of House Martin Study Group - L.A. Hill

The Fourth Annual Report of the House Martin Study Group contains some fascinating facts :

"Firstly, no one knows where in Africa do our British birds spend the winter; secondly, no one knows where House Martins spend the hours of darkness in the summer (when not roosting in their nests) ; thirdly, no one knows where they roost when on migration or when in their African winter quarters, south of the Sahara desert, either.

There are two schools of thought regarding their roosting habits :-

- (i) In trees, in small parties, coming down after dusk.
- (ii) On the wing, high up in the sky, like Swifts.

The second school believes that the fact that their legs are feathered may be to prevent loss of heat when they are 'roosting' at high altitudes, on the wing.

Little Paradise for Birdwatching - Thomas Gay

Being too busy ever to go for Bird Walks, or to deliberately look for birds, I am confined to birds which 'thrust themselves on my attention'. These number about 60 birds within 50 yards of our small plot. Of these 60, 18 have taken food at my door-including white-breasted waterhen, blue rock-thrush, yellow-eyed babblers, two kinds of wagtail, and all the usual mynas, robins and bulbuls. The wagtails are especially interesting, because Salim Ali does not record them as eaters of any sort of grain food; but I've watched

them picking up crumbs of wheat chappati from only a few feet away! The same applies to the rock thrush, who is perhaps my most honoured guest. I keep a daily record of who comes when, and does what; and if I can infuse enough energy into my ageing body and brain, I would like to work out a longish article, and send it to BNHS or your Newsletter.



RINGED BIRDS. J.S. SERRAO, A/001, Sheetal, Behind Avinash, 7 Bungalows, Vaswani Marg, Andheri (A), Bombay 400 053

The copy of Newsletter Vol.34(5), Sept-Oct 1994 has just come in, and the most interesting item therein is the recovery of bird rings (p.119).

- 1 Ring 92 444 CMHS, I suspect, is an Australian bird ring, and the CSIRO, Canberra, may be in a position to throw light on it. CMHS may stand for some department of CSIRO dealing with perhaps Marine Hydrological Surveys. The bird that carried it could be a curlew sandpiper (*Calidris testacea*) (formerly *Calidris ferruginea*). The bird breeds in extreme northern Asia from about 80°E longitude, and winters in Africa, Madagascar, Southern Asia to Australia. On its way to and from Australia it goes via India, and on 28.8.1980, one such with an Australian ring (040-92431) ringed on 20.11.1976 was recovered at Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu.
- 2 Whitenecked stork (*Ciconia episcopus*) has an overall range from Africa east through the Indo-Chinese sub-region, Philippines, Sulawesi (Celebes) and Borneo. It is interesting to find it with a Russian ring also intriguing because of its lateral range. The address on the ring should enable you to write to Moscow and directly get the information. For me this is the first ringed recovery of the

bird since 1948, and it has much to add to our knowledge about the northward range of the bird if the ring was placed beyond our geographical region.



A PITTA MYSTERY. KUMARAN SATHASIVAM. 29, Jadamuni Koil Street, Madurai 625 001

One day in late October, after a night of particularly heavy rainfall, a dead pitta *Pitta brachyura* was found in the backyard garden. Nothing remarkable about this may be, as pittas seem to have a propensity for landing up exhausted in houses and dying there. In fact, a pitta turned up even here some years back – and the heart of Madurai city must surely be one of the most Bird-Unfriendly Areas of the World. However, the circumstances in which this bird was discovered were curious.

The pitta seemed to have come to a violent end as one wing was torn off and lying nearby. Multicoloured feathers were scattered all around. The foot of a large raptor lay close to the pitta. This foot, very yellow in colour and armed with the long talons of a bird of prey had only three toes on it. The soil was gashed at several places nearby. No amount of speculation has been able to provide a satisfactory explanation.

The next morning, the red ants had evidently been busy on the pitta, for the body seemed to have crumbled. The very feathers appeared powdery and even the head of the pitta was barely discernible. On the second day, the ants were keeping up the good work. The pitta was not recognizable as one any more. It had become a nondescript little heap. All the gaudy colours had vanished, and the legs were snipped off the body. The garden was swept the next day and the remains removed so that the completion of the natural disposal process could not be observed. However, the rapidity with which the dead pitta disintegrated suggests an answer to the question, "Where are all the dead birds?" (T.V. Jose, Vol 33, No. 5); those birds that die are quickly consumed by ants and other creatures.



CHECKLIST OF BIRDS OF MADURAI AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE. KUMARAN SATHASIVAM. 29, Jadamuni Koil Street, Madurai 625 001

The Checklist of Birds of Madurai Agricultural College in Tamilnadu by K. Gunathilagaraj (Vol. 34, No.1 January – February 1994) was interesting.

A number of species that I have observed to be locally uncommon or have never seen here, including osprey, redwattled lapwing, redwhiskered bulbul, common babbler, yellowheaded wagtail, crested tree swift, dusky crag martin, and blackheaded oriole are named in the list. However, the author's conclusions about the status of these species

around Madurai are lacking and would be appreciated in a subsequent issue of the Newsletter.

Observations of bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, tawny eagle, house martin and wiretailed swallow are unexpected in the region and merit separate notes with details of the author's records.



INDIAN BIRD PAINTINGS BY LADY GWILLIM : A REJOINDER. S. SUBRAMANYA, PHT Scheme, 'J' Block, G.K.V.K., University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore 560 065

I was quite amused to read the over-reaction by Kumar Ghorpade (NLBW 34 : 134-135, 1994) towards my article on Gwillim's paintings at McGill University, Montreal (NLBW 34 : 74-76, 1994). Ghorpade seems to have failed to see the very purpose of my article, which was simply to share my joy with birdwatchers in India, of finding Lady Gwillim's paintings at Montreal. It was also to let them know that McGill owns such a rare collection of paintings on Indian birds painted in Madras during early 1800s.

My 'exuberance', as noted by Ghorpade, was due to the facts that the works of Lady Gwillim were virtually unknown, she was not even part of the 'published history' of bird paintings (for which Ghorpade has used up nearly half a page, for reasons known only to him!) and all her paintings on Indian birds were done much before Audubon's works. Considering these, coming across her works in Montreal was quite thrilling in itself. My joy was akin to that birdwatchers so often experience on seeing a very rare bird or a bird on the top of their 'want-to-see' life-list.

Most of the details in my article (as already mentioned in it) including the list of paintings (reproduced verbatim, save the typographical errors), were provided to me by the library staff at Blacker-Wood. In the two hours that I spent in the rare book section at the library, I did not have enough time to note down the names of the birds in each painting, as in addition to looking at the paintings, I spent some time going through some of the manuscripts written by several British ornithologists like A.O. Hume and Hugh Whistler. I do not remember to have seen any names on the paintings. However, looking at the list, it appears that the list was prepared at the library by some one else, as it contains more recent scientific names of birds. I do agree that the list (prepared in no particular order) contains factual errors. Also, I was too busy during the rest of my stay at McGill, to find out if the library staff knew from where Lady Gwillim got her subjects or to see if the painting of the 'alligator' was indeed that of a crocodile or to dwell on what Terry Short was doing in India. I would probably have answers to more such questions when I visit McGill next and shall try to get a set of pictures of the paintings.

Finally, I do not think that I am wrong in referring to some of Audubon's paintings as being 'dramatic' or

'over-theatrical'. I am surprised to note that for a person who could write at length on bird paintings and their history, Ghorpade does not properly know Audubon's great works of art. I wonder if he ever tried to judge the artist's style. If he has not, I would suggest that he at least takes a look at Audubon's paintings of Bobwhite, Gyrfalcon, American Eider, Great Black-backed Gull, Prairie Chicken and American Egret (to name a few) to see my point. The following lines from William Vogt's introduction to the 1962 Macmillan edition of Audubon's book "*The Birds of America*" seem to echo my own assessment : '... Audubon vowed he would never paint stuffed specimens and took ornithological art out of its glass case for all times. If some of his realism as in the gory beaked - Duck Hawk - now seem overtheatrical, it should be remembered that he was in vigorous revolt against

the stodgy methods of painters of his day. The dramatic always appealed to him, and his ability to dramatize his subjects brought forth instant response from scientists and connoisseurs'.



ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB GRANT TO S. SUBRAMANYA.

The Oriental Bird Club has awarded a Grant of £500 to Dr. S. Subramanya, Bangalore, for his work on the "Catalogue of Indian Heronries".



Last post for Swiss army's pigeons by Edward Luce

A 77-Year relationship between the Swiss army and the country's large carrier pigeon population was brought to a close this week when senior military figures decided it was time for the army to update its communications.

Announcing that 30,000 Alpine pigeons would have to find employment elsewhere, the Swiss army said it regretted having to make the cuts but costs were soaring and pigeons would have to bear the burden like everyone else.

"This is the end of pigeon-fancying in Switzerland," said Joseph Domjan, owner of a pigeon farm near Lake Geneva.

Speaking on behalf of Switzerland's numerous pigeon-fanciers, Mr. Domjan claimed that the pigeon had helped bring neutral Switzerland safely through two world wars.

Flying at a speed of up to 50 miles an hour and at a height of 6,000 ft. the carrier pigeon had demonstrated its loyalty beyond any doubt. "Pigeons are the most reliable way of relaying information at great speed to the other side of the country," cooed Mr. Domjan. "You can't jam pigeons or tap them like a telephone."

The fate of the redundant pigeons is uncertain.

The army said it planned to train 12 of the birds to compete on the European racing circuit. Some of the other 29,988 Swiss army pigeons could go into civvies as pets, the army suggested.

Courtesy : The Guardian

Cover : Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) with its distinctive chequered plumage, gets its name for its familiar call, *hoo-po-po* uttered with monotonous regularity. It strolls on the ground probing into the soil with its beak - a miniature pickaxe, in search of insects and grub. When alarmed, it jerks up and opens its handsome crest in a spectacular display.

Photo : S. Sridhar ARPS

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— EDITOR

